

Weakened U.S. Manufacturing Is Still Strong

Built from a career in supply chain and manufacturing leadership, Chip White's interview offers some interesting perspective on where U.S. manufacturing has been and where it can go with the right direction and investment.

Interview by Jeff Reinke

Despite media reports that tend to focus on job loss, plant closings and other negative events, the truth is that while U.S. manufacturing has been weakened in recent years, it is still quite strong. Perhaps no one knows this better than Chelsea C. (Chip) White, the Schneider National Chair of Transportation and Logistics in the School of Industrial & Systems Engineering at the Georgia Institute of Technology.

Some of his most recent research has focused on the role of real-time information for improved logistics, supply chain productivity and risk mitigation.

He recently sat down with editorial director Jeff Reinke to discuss a number of large-scale supply chain solutions for U.S. manufacturers that center on a stronger infrastructure and improving global competitiveness.

Q: Where, in your opinion, does President Obama need to start when it comes to properly supporting the manufacturing sector?

A: Congressional dysfunction has to change, regardless of who the president is. Whether it's a great company or a great country, bad leadership will impact the direction. Now that things are settled with the presidential election, legislators have the ability to really focus on fixing problems, and they need to start.

Q: Right now our country faces some challenges in getting the next generation of workers interested in manufacturing-based careers. Do you have any thoughts on how to create a stronger interest?

A: Manufacturing and the supply chain have always been linked, and continue to dramatically impact each other. So the trick may be to show the next generation just how the world works in connecting manufacturing with the impact it has on people's lives. These careers could also be profitable ones by having the government invest in the right R&D, as well as by improving the country's physical and information infrastructure to make the U.S. more competitive.

I think it's important to remember that while our recent past is not as positive, there are reasons to be optimistic about our future. As our global economic position has declined, we have improved our understanding of the reasons for the decline. So we're now in a better place to properly invest and create better manufacturing and job opportunities.

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Q: What factors lead you down your current career path?

A: My interest has always been to engage in real-world issues, as opposed to being an ivory tower academic. I've always wanted to understand how the world works—how information impacts the way things are made and the way they flow through the supply chain. I find it interesting to analyze and describe these things and then demonstrate them mathematically.

Q: If you could wake up tomorrow knowing one thing that you don't know today, what would it be?

How to resolve the fiscal cliff.

Q: What types of people do you look up to?

A: In addition to my parents, there have been teachers and other professionals that I have admired. I've always tried to understand behaviors from a number of different perspectives, so I've always been drawn to people with good judgment who are able to make good decisions under stress. I like people with intestinal fortitude.

Q: We'll be doing a webinar together on Wednesday, November 28. Without giving too much away, what do you think will be the biggest takeaway for attendees?

A: We'll talk about trends in manufacturing, like logistics, reverse globalization, supply chain innovation and how patent law and the tax policy can work for and against manufacturing.

I'm looking forward to discussing how investing in information and physical infrastructure, as well as skill set infrastructure, i.e. getting away from outsourcing things like ship welding and nuclear power plant construction, can improve our manufacturing competitiveness. This stems from the WEF (World Economic Forum) competition index which shows that the U.S. has been gradually slipping in its ranking over the last 4-5 years. Innovative technologies like additive manufacturing and nanotechnology will also be discussed as possible solutions and areas of investment going forward.

To hear more from Chip White and to register for the free webinar discussed above, click [here](#) [1].

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